

A day in the life: The Burren

Story of the day

SHARE PRINT EMAIL TEXT SIZE

By Pól Ó Conghaile
Saturday March 28 2009

The Burren is more moonscape than landscape. Dissolving limestone, swallow holes, dints, grykes and a wind that would slice your bones -- even its name sounds bleak. But take a closer look.

The place is home to Ireland's oldest perfumery. It is spotted with forts and famine villages, and a location site for much of Father Ted. Shortly, an explosion of 650 species of flora will usher in Ballyvaughan's Burren in Bloom Festival (May 2-31; burrencollege.ie). Far from austere, the Burren is teeming with life.



Pól Ó Conghaile pays a visit to 'Craggy Island Parochial House', well known to Father Ted fans

Activity of the day

The best way to see this gigantic rock garden is by foot, and Tony Kirby of Heart of Burren Walks (065 682 7707; heartofburrenwalks.com) takes me to Abbey Hill for a taster. The spot is named for a nearby Cistercian Abbey, whose name translates as 'Mary of the Fertile Rock'.

"That's the whole paradox of the Burren," Tony says, "fertile rock." It looks desolate, but glacial till in the valleys is choice for cattle and, come spring and early summer, flowers start to fizzle and burst through the fissures.

One of Tony's walks emerges at a bleak old farmhouse near Killinaboy. It looks familiar, and it is. "It's like living in a goldfish bowl," says Sheryl McCormack, whose home doubled as Craggy Island Parochial House during the shooting of Father Ted. Ted-heads just keep on coming, she says (though she wishes they'd keep the cars off her fupping grass). "If I put a sign up front, I'd be a millionaire."

View of the day

The Burren boasts an awesome stash of archaeological monuments, but Caherconnell (065 708 9999; burrenforts.ie; €5) is the only fort scientifically developed for tourism.

Nurtured by the Davoren family, the idea has been to invest in an interpretive centre, but leave the moss-covered centrepiece alone. "This is it as it was, more or less, when the last guy walked out," Sean Davoren says, as an orange sun dips into the horizon. It's the perfect complement to Poul nabrone Dolmen up the road.

Catch of the day

Milly, a darting-eyed Saker Falcon, cuts low circles above the Burren Bird of Prey Centre (065 707 7036; birdofpreycentre.com). "She can see about 10 times better than we can. Her whole world is visual," says Ben Johnson, as Milly stoops for the lure he's swinging. Her reward is a day-old chick, which she destroys juicily. Nearby are a white-tailed sea eagle, white-backed vulture, and several species of owl.

I last came to Aillwee Cave (065 707 7036; www.aillwee.cave.ie; €17/€10 combined with Bird Centre) on a school tour. Twenty years later, I find not only exotic birds, but a farm shop, cheese and fudge production, and a tasteful upgrade at the showcave itself. Bear bones, waxy calcite formations and cascading trickles make for an impressive tour, a good tip for a rainy day -- when the underground waterfalls are booming. "You can barely hear the person next to you," says my guide, Liz Darcy.

Discovery of the day

O'Loclainn's pub (065 707 7006; irishwhiskeybar.com) looks manicured outside, but inside this Ballyvaughan beauty another world awaits. Three hundred bottles of whiskey glow from closely-stacked shelves. There are waist-high counters, black dispensary drawers and the brassy shell of an old till.

Peter O'Loughlin is the fifth generation owner; he farms cattle by day, opening up the bar at 8pm each evening. As we're chatting, Brendan Gleeson and Gerard Byrne (Fair City's Malachy) pop in for a pint. They're perfectly at home. So is everyone else.

Dish of the day

The set menu at Gregans Castle (065 707 7005; gregans.ie) costs €65. This price range puts me on high alert. It's fine-dining territory, and if a couple forks out more than €130 for a single meal in a recession, they'd better come away with a very personal experience, and a memory to cherish.

Thankfully, head chef Mickael Viljanen pulls it off. His delicacy of hand has both canapé (chicken liver mousse on crispy pancake) and starter (pan-fried mackerel) melting in the mouth.

It's serious cuisine without the laboured artiness that pushes so many restaurants into pretentiousness. The dining room is the right mix of sober and relaxing too, with twinkling views over the lights of Galway City.

Remains of the day

Articles Topics

Articles

[Pedal power strikes back](#)
Teen disabled at birth settles his court action for €3m

Topics

[Ballyvaughan](#)
[Sean Davoren](#)
[Gregans Castle](#)
[Ireland](#)
[Tony Kirby](#)
[Cistercian Abbey](#)
[Mickael Viljanen](#)

Also in Inside Ireland

[10 Best...hotels who go the extra mile](#)
[Walk of the week: Silver River, Slieve Bloom Mountains, Co Offaly](#)
[Take 10: Old Dublin pubs](#)
[Walk of the week: Dingle Way, west Kerry](#)
[A day in the life: Connemara](#)

Inside Ireland Home

Independent.ie Web

Ads by Google

Woodstock Hotel Golf & Spa
Luxury accommodation including Beauty Spa, Pool, Gym & Golf resort
www.WoodstockEnnis.com

Fantasy Rugby
Free to Play. Great Prizes! Register now for the Masters.
www.4majors.com/masters

Rugby Union Live On Sky
Watch Tri Nations Rugby live on SkySports in HD. Join Sky Sports today
www.Sky.com/Ireland

NEW!

Post a Single Job by Credit Card!



LoadzaJobs.ie
An Independent News & Media Company

Flights Hotels Flight & Hotel Car Hire

Flights

Return One Way I prefer direct flights

From City Name **To** City Name or Airport

Depart: dd/mm/yy **Return:** dd/mm/yy

Passengers: Adult (18-64) Senior (65+) Child (0-17)

Class: Economy [More search options](#)

Hotels

Destination City Name [Other Destinations](#)

Check in: dd/mm/yyyy **Check out:** dd/mm/yyyy

Number of rooms:

[More Search Options](#)

Flight & Hotel

From City Name **To** City Name or Airport

Depart: dd/mm/yy **Return:** dd/mm/yy

Passengers: Adult (18-64) Senior (65+) Child (0-17)

Car Hire

Pick-up from:

Pick-up Date: dd/mm/yy **Time:**

Drop-off to:

Drop-off Date: dd/mm/yy **Time:**

Age of the driver:

Win a trip to Istanbul!